Use of Infrared Termography (IRT) in equine assisted interventions: physiological aspects

Veronica Redaelli\textsuperscript{1}, Marta De Santis\textsuperscript{2}, Silvia Gozzo\textsuperscript{1}, Laura Contalbrigo\textsuperscript{2}, Annalisa Stefani\textsuperscript{2}, Marta Toson\textsuperscript{2}, Luca Farina\textsuperscript{2}, Marta Borgi\textsuperscript{3}, Francesca Cirulli\textsuperscript{3}, Emanuela Valle\textsuperscript{4}, Fabio Luzi\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1} Dipartimento di Medicina Veterinaria, University of Milano, Italy
\textsuperscript{2} Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie, Legnaro, Italy
\textsuperscript{3} Centro di riferimento per le Scienze comportamentali e la Salute Mentale, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Roma, Italy
\textsuperscript{4} Dipartimento di Scienze Veterinarie, University of Torino, Italy

Contact: vereda@tin.it
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In particular, in this paper physiological indicators of the welfare of horses involved in therapeutic sessions of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are taken into account: cortisol levels in saliva and blood samples, surface body temperature in the area of the lacrimal caruncle, and heart rate variability. All data were collected from horses following the same session protocol with a child with ASD and a typically developing child (control group). Moreover, each therapeutic session was standardized and divided into different phases (baseline, grooming, start, riding, alt, end, post).

From the analysis of thermographic results significant temperature increases were registered from the baseline phase to grooming activities, start and post work session, only in the group consisting of children with ASD and not in typically-developing children.

In particular, it was noted that the horses ridden by children with ASD showed almost at all stages greater periorcular temperature than horses ridden by control children, although this difference was statistically significant only in the post-work phase.

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